

The *Fideles* 2009 Symposium: The Roots of Western Culture
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Natural Theology and Natural Justice in Plato's *Laws*

In Book X of his *Laws*, Plato seeks to prove the existence of God, or of gods, who are the source and measure of justice and just laws. In the process, he presents what John Wild has aptly called “a complex argument for the priority of rational life over lifeless matter as the first moving principle or nature of the cosmos.” Pope Benedict XVI, in his Regensburg address, refers to a Platonic element in modern scientific reason, inasmuch as the methodology of modern science presupposes that nature has rational structures which correspond to the human mind. It is through its Platonic element that Benedict says modern scientific reason “bears within itself a question which points beyond itself and the possibilities of its methodology.” This paper will discuss the outlines of Plato's argument in Book X of the *Laws* and address criticisms which have been brought against it by George Klosko and Hans Kelsen. It will also comment upon the way in which the study of Plato might contribute to a broadening of our contemporary concept of reason, and upon the question of whether the notions of God and natural justice in Plato's thought are compatible with teachings of the Bible and Christian tradition.